

Assimilation, Gender, and Political Participation

The Mexican American Case

Marcelo A. Böhrst Seegers^{*}
University of Texas at Austin

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Abstract

In this paper, I attempt to determine whether Mexican Americans have assimilated into mainstream America in terms political participation, and whether the assimilation experience is different for men than it is for women. Using data from the 2004 Current Population Survey [CPS] November Voter Supplement, I conduct a series of cross tabulations in order to uncover the patterns of assimilation of Mexican American men and women across generations and compared to non-Hispanic Whites and Blacks. I find persistent gaps between non-Hispanic Whites and Blacks and Mexican Americans, which do not favor the latter. I also find that men and women present different patterns of assimilation. Finally, I notice that the assimilation process is influenced both by individual level factors, such as education, and context.

As of 2006, the United States Census Bureau estimated that over 28 million or about 9.5 percent of the country's population is of Mexican origin. Mexican Americans also account for almost two-thirds of the Hispanic population. Almost 60 percent of the Mexican-origin population are U.S.-born, while no more than 9 percent are naturalized citizens. Hence, together native-born Mexican Americans and naturalized Mexican immigrants represent more than 40 percent of the total number of Hispanics or Latinos in the United States. As the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006), one cannot help but to wonder whether this group is assimilating into middle-class America in terms of one of the most important aspects of American life and of immigrant incorporation (Rumbaut, 1997): political participation. Little research has been conducted on this topic, yet the descendants of immigrants will certainly change the face of the American electorate (Clark, 2003) as Mexican Americans grow to become a quarter of the population by 2050 (Passel, as cited in Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Unlike most studies on political participation, I will not try to determine the impact that Mexican American political behavior has on American politics, but their convergence into or divergence from mainstream American society in terms of political participation. Although the general patterns of Hispanic assimilation into American political life may provide clues about the Mexican American population, disaggregating this panethnic group is necessary in order to better understand how the various Hispanic subgroups operate (Portes & Truelove, 1987).

Also necessary is the need to consider the assimilation process of the Mexican American population generational subgroups. Looking at the experience of the first-, second-, and third- and higher-generations may provide great insights on the assimilation of Mexican Americans, since some scholars have identified downward trends in later generations. However, a relevant intersection must be considered when talking about assimilation: that of gender and ethnicity.

Research has shown that gender shapes the decision of Mexican citizens to immigrate to the United States (Kanaiaupuni, 2000); does it also affect their assimilation process? Portes & Rumbaut (2001) claim that gender may play a significant role in immigrants' and their descendants' experience, given that males and females are socialized differently. Such gender-differentiated socialization, which occurs in the family, at school, the workplace, among other settings, generates disparities in the political behavior of women and men (Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001), their life opportunities and, consequently, their assimilation patterns.

In this paper, I address the following questions: is the Mexican American population assimilating into Anglo-White America in terms of political participation? Or does it present a pattern of political segmented? Do Mexican-origin women and men experience different processes of assimilation? Now, I will proceed to review some of the relevant literature regarding the assimilation of Mexican Americans, their political participation and gender.

Assimilation Perspectives and Mexican Americans

The literature on assimilation in general has two dominant perspectives: the classical straight-line assimilation theory and the more recent theory of segmented assimilation. Classic straight-line assimilation theory (as summarized in Saenz & Morales, 2005) involves a series of subprocesses in which the minority group members adopt the culture, attitudes and values of the dominant group, and stop suffering prejudice and discrimination. In the case of the United States, minority groups come into full self-identification with middle-class America. However, according to Zhou (1997), a series of findings inconsistent with classic assimilation theory have appeared in the literature. Based on these findings and critical of classic assimilation theory, segmented assimilation (as summarized in Zhou, 1997) builds upon the assimilation perspective to argue that immigrants and their descendants incorporate into the system of stratification of the

receiving society in divergent ways. The interaction between individual-level factors, such as education, and structural factors, such as race and socioeconomic background, determines into what stratum of the receiving society immigrants incorporate. The concept of “adversarial subculture” (p. 989) derives from this theory, suggesting that children or grandchildren of immigrants and native minorities whose aspirations have been frustrated will develop a resistance and rejection toward assimilation into the larger society.

Few researchers have discussed the assimilation of Mexican Americans in terms of political participation (Jones-Correa, 1998; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001; Clark, 2003). Even though the role played by gender in political participation has been studied by some scholars, it seems that the question of whether Mexican American males and females present different patterns of assimilation into American political life has yet to be answered. Most of the assimilationist literature has discussed immigrants’ and their descendants’ assimilation into mainstream America mainly in matters of socioeconomic indicators, such as education, income and employment (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Farley & Alba, 2002; Waldinger & Feliciano, 2004; Waters & Jiménez, 2005; Valdez, 2006), and other indicators, such as spatial concentration, intermarriage and English language acquisition (Waters & Jimenez, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

A debate exists as to which theory explains the incorporation process of contemporary immigrants. Many studies have found little evidence of downward assimilation. Looking at national level data from the Current Population Survey, Waldinger & Feliciano (2004) find that the job-holding rates of second generation Mexican men and women are similar to those of native-born Whites and diverge from those of African Americans and Puerto Ricans. In another study, Farley & Alba (2002) ascertain that today’s second generation presents greater

educational attainment, occupational achievement and economic status than their immigrant parents. In some cases, educational attainment even exceeds those of third- and higher-generation whites and African Americans, except for Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans. Similarly, Waters & Jiménez (2005) state that the “United States continues to show remarkable progress in absorbing new immigrants,” such as Mexicans and Latinos (p. 121).

Nevertheless, other studies have uncovered evidence of downward assimilation and of the emergence of oppositional cultures among immigrants and their descendants. Early qualitative studies hinted at the emergence of an adversarial subculture among Mexican American high school students in California (Portes & Zhou, 1993). “Participation in this subculture,” the authors contend, “leads to serious barriers to their chances of upward mobility...” (p. 89). Perlmann & Waldinger (1997) find that the socioeconomic characteristics second-generation Mexican Americans differ negatively from those of non-Hispanic Whites. Valdez (2006) finds that in the Southwest, low-skilled Mexicans assimilate downward, i.e. resemble Blacks, in terms of earnings and occupational achievement, while their high-skilled counterparts assimilate into middle-class white America. Three studies that discuss assimilation in terms of political participation also find evidence consistent with segmented assimilation theory. Clark (2003) and Ramakrishnan & Espenshade (2001) show that U.S. born Hispanics present participatory levels similar to or in some cases lower than Hispanic immigrants, but always lower than non-Hispanic Whites. Moreover, Jones-Correa (1998) claims better political integration of Latino women than men in New York. The literature on the assimilation of Mexican Americans in terms of political participation is limited, given that most studies have focused on socioeconomic factors. Among those that have looked at assimilation and political participation, the broad Hispanic panethnicity may not necessarily represent the specific case of Mexican Americans. Nevertheless, previous

findings on the assimilation of Mexican Americans into mainstream America can provide us with clues on what to expect when looking at this paper's research questions.

Mexican Americans and Political Participation

Studies about Mexican American assimilation into American political life are scarce, but political participation is an important indicator of whether a group is assimilating into the mainstream, as per classic assimilation, or following divergent paths as predicted by segmented assimilation. Most studies on minorities and political participation focus either on the aggregated ethnic groups of immigrants, such as Hispanics, and their offspring rather than on Mexican Americans specifically or look at Mexican Americans only in certain regions (Junn, 1999; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001; Bass & Casper, 2001; Clark, 2003; Wolfinger & Wolfinger, 2008). Although the disaggregation of the Hispanic panethnicity makes sense, a few authors have labeled such attempts as limiting (Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001; Jackson, 2003). Other studies, instead, have narrowed their scope to the study of Hispanics and Mexican Americans in certain metropolitan areas or states (Junn, 1999; Bedolla, 2000; Johnson, Stein, & Wrinkle, 2003). However, they have provided us with little information on the political incorporation of Mexican Americans nationally. Despite their weaknesses, these studies have contributed significant findings useful in generating hypotheses about the country as a whole.

Studies of minority political participation have found that overall immigrants and ethnic minorities in the United States are less politically active in terms of political participation than non-Hispanic Whites. Hispanics are no exception. Looking at national level data, Junn (1999) finds higher registration and voting rates for Whites and Blacks than for Hispanics. Other authors have confirmed that Hispanic levels of electoral participation are lower than those of non-Hispanic Whites (Bass & Casper, 2001; Lien, 1998; Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001;

Wolfinger & Wolfinger, 2008). On the contrary, Ramakirshnan & Espenshade (2001) and Clark (2003) note that naturalized Latino immigrants living in the United States for over twenty years are just as likely to participate as third generation Whites. Yet, they also point out decreased levels among later generations. However, do these findings apply to Mexican Americans?

Some studies have found that much like Hispanics overall, Mexican Americans present political participation rates lower than non-Hispanic Whites. Bass & Casper (2001) find that Mexican Americans are less likely to register to vote than other Hispanics. Data about Mexican Americans in Texas also suggest lower voting rates for Mexican Americans than Whites (Junn, 1999). Although Jackson (2003) claims that registered Latinos show similar voting rates as non-Latinos, he notes that this is not the case for registered Mexican Americans. These results are strong evidence that disaggregation of the Hispanic category is necessary. Yet, Junn's data on Mexican Americans is limited to Texas and Bass & Casper's to naturalized Americans, while Jackson fails to differentiate between native-born children of immigrants and later generations.

Generational status and political participation has been the cause of some debate, especially given its implications regarding assimilation. Despite failing to differentiate between second-, and third- and plus-generations, Jackson (2003) finds that native-born Latinos and Mexican Americans are more likely to participate than their immigrant counterparts. Similarly, Junn's (1999) national data analysis shows increasing registration and voting rates for Hispanics with each successive generation, the largest jump occurring between the first and second generations. Junn's Texas data evidenced the same pattern for Mexican Americans. Moreover, she finds third-generation Mexican Americans' electoral rates in Texas to resemble those of African Americans, who in turn participate at lower rates than non-Hispanic Whites. Such pattern, however, does not play out nationally. Although Junn's findings for Mexican Americans

in Texas provide a useful insight, there is a lack of knowledge on the patterns of participation of the different Mexican American generational groups at the national level.

Contrary to the findings that political participation increases with generational status, Ramakrishnan & Espenshade (2001) and Clark (2003) find that voting among Latinos peaks among naturalized citizens it decreases for later generation Latinos. Nonetheless, Ramakrishnan & Espenshade's logistic regressions seem to fail to account for differences in age among the different generations, which may in part explain higher participatory levels for first generation Latinos. Unfortunately, both of these studies examined the political incorporation of Hispanics as a whole, but not of Mexican Americans in particular.

Other factors that have been found to have strong effects on Hispanic and Mexican American political participation are age, education, ethnic networks, gender, homeownership and residential stability. These factors, thus, may be avenues to assimilation. Jackson (2003) finds that Mexican American's "lower levels of education and income, their youth and mobility, and their greater likelihood to be immigrants" (p. 347) account for their lower levels political participation. Others have confirmed increasing participatory levels as age and educational attainment increase for Hispanics and Mexican Americans (Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001; Johnson, Stein, & Wrinkle, 2003; Lien, 1998). However, Cho (1999) argues that rising socioeconomic status is not sufficient for increased electoral participation. Cho also notes that as long as primary barriers to political participation continue to exist, such as language, minorities in general will continue to lag behind non-Hispanic Whites in terms of voting.

Although contradicting the classic accounts of straight-line assimilation into White America, researchers have found that proximity to co-ethnics has weak yet positive effects in Hispanic voting participation (Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001). Moreover, a study of

Latinos, mostly Mexican Americans, in Southern Texas demonstrated that Spanish-speaking Latinos are more likely to vote than English-speaking Latinos (Johnson, Stein, & Wrinkle, 2003). These findings could imply that immigrants may develop their own patterns of integration into American life rather than give up their culture and adopt that of White America, as classic assimilation theorists have often suggested.

Gender, Political Participation and Mexican Americans

As mentioned previously, some scholars have argued that gender-differentiated socialization shapes the immigration (Kanaiaupuni, 2001) and political experience (Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001) of men and women differently. As gender influences migration and political behavior, does it also affect the process of political assimilation of Mexican American men and women? Do these patterns persist in later generations?

The literature on gender and political participation in the United States is abundant, yet it has too often failed to differentiate between the different ethnic groups in the country. Thus, the number of studies that have focused on the role of gender in the political behavior of minorities is small (Jones-Correa, 1998; Lien, 1998; Junn, 1999; Bedolla, 2000; Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001; Bass & Casper, 2001; Jackson, 2003), even more so when considering Mexican Americans specifically. Moreover, the lack of studies on the role of gender in the assimilation experience of minorities is remarkable. Nonetheless, relevant debates have emerged from these studies as of the participatory levels of women and men in general and across minorities.

On the one hand, some researchers have found men to be more active than women. Burns and her associates (2001) found that regardless of race or ethnicity, women show lower political participation than men. The researchers assert that Latinos participate less than Anglo-Whites and women Latino women less than their male counterparts. Moreover, the evidence shows that

Anglo-White men are the most politically active and Latina women the least. In regards to Mexican Americans, only one study concludes that being male has a positive effect in political participation, but the findings are only applicable to Texas (Junn, 1999).

On the other hand, some researchers have found the gender gap to favor women. Looking at the data from the CPS, Lien (1998) notes small disparities in voter registration and gender among Blacks and Whites that favor women. Instead, using the race poll data, Lien finds gender differences in political attitudes to be stronger, except in the case of Latino men and women. In another study, Bass & Casper (2001) make the case that naturalized Latin American women more likely to vote than others. Wolfinger & Wolfinger (2008) point out that never-married mothers present participation rates significantly higher than never-married fathers.

Unfortunately, except for Lien's article, these studies are limited in that they either focus on naturalized citizens or fail to differentiate by race and ethnicity. Lien's work is deficient in its inattentiveness toward the role of generational status in political participation.

In addition, some authors have found that gender has no significant effect in participatory levels or that a gender gap exists only among some groups. The latter is the case for Lien (1998) and Bass & Casper (2001). Lien concludes that "the gender gap in registration and voting is far less distinct than the racial gap and that it does vary across racial groups" (p. 878). Also, in spite of pointing out that naturalized women from Latin America voted more, Bass & Casper are unable to find a gender gap among all other naturalized men and women. Similarly, national level data on citizen participation show that gender has no significant effect on voting across ethnic groups (Junn, 1999). The large discrepancies in findings in the realm of gender, political participation, and race and ethnicity indicate that further research is needed in the interaction of these three concepts. There is also a need to look at the experience of Mexican Americans and

their descendants separately, since their relevance in the electoral arena cannot be disregarded. Finally, very little has been mentioned about the assimilation of men and women in terms of political participation, a knowledge gap I will attempt to fill for Mexican Americans.

The process of assimilation of Mexican Americans in the United States' political life still remains unclear. So far, studies have shown both evidence of straight-line assimilation for Mexican-origin males and females, in terms of job-holding and education, and support for downward assimilation trends and adversarial subculture emergence. In fact, research has suggested that Hispanics in general and Mexican Americans in particular present political participation trends of assimilation that are divergent from non-Hispanic Whites, yet less so for women. In addition, some authors have identified decreasing rates of political participation for later Latino generations, while others have observed a greater likelihood of participation among the U.S.-born generations and among women. Finally, minority community resources have been found to have some positive effects for Latinos.

Despite the significance of these findings, most of these studies have shortcomings that blur the complete story of Mexican American political participation and assimilation. Hispanic panethnicity has seldom been disaggregated, in spite of evidence that the Mexican American case seems to diverge greatly. The research has often been limited to certain geographic contexts or specific generations. In the case of political participation, research fails to discuss processes of assimilation. Finally, gender has tended to be included as a control variable in regression models, which assumes that "the social processes under examination operate in the same way for women and men" (Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001). Those who have conducted separate analysis for men and women have not looked at generational status or Mexican Americans.

In order to address these gaps, I look at the participatory rates of different Mexican American generations by gender, compared to Anglo-Whites. Since much of the research on the influence of gender on political participation and assimilation seems inconclusive, I develop my expectations in line with what studies seem to agree about Hispanics in general and Mexican Americans in particular. Given the previous findings, I expect that Mexican Americans will not be fully assimilated by the third generation. Yet, I expect to see a closing gap between Mexican Americans with more education and their White counterparts. Lastly, given findings regarding migrant communities, I expect to find higher participatory levels in areas where Mexican Americans come into contact with each other more often and would be considered by classic assimilation theorists to be less assimilated.

Data, Measures and Methods

This analysis relies on the 2004 Current Population Survey [CPS] November Voter Supplement. The CPS, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau each month, is a national probability sample of approximately 56,000 households. The November Voter Supplement, which is administered a week after national elections, is the only electoral national survey that allows the identification of Anglo-White, African American and Mexican American first-, second-, and third- and higher-generations, since it includes questions on the country of birth of the respondent and his or her parents. Given the large size of the sample (96,958 adult U.S. citizens in November, 2006), subgroup samples are large enough for statistical analysis. In addition, it contains questions on race, ethnicity, detail origin for Hispanic ethnicity, and other socio-demographic variables. This information, combined with the questions on voter registration and voting turnout, allows for analysis on the participatory levels of Mexican Americans compared to Whites and Blacks. Unfortunately, the CPS does not include any

questions on other forms of political activity. As Ramakrishnan & Espenshade (2001) note, the answers to the registration and voting questions are not validated with any public record of registration or voting; thus, misreporting is a potential problem.

In this study, I analyze adults who are over the age of 18 and who answered the questions on registration and voting. The sample is composed of all third- and higher-generation non-Hispanic Whites, third- and higher-generation non-Hispanic Blacks, and Mexican-origin U.S. citizens who answered the CPS question on voting registration; thus, I exclude those citizens who refused to answer. I end up with a large sample of 72,925 adults (62,967 third- and higher-generation non-Hispanic Whites; 6,973 third- and higher-generation non-Hispanic Blacks; 630 naturalized Mexicans; 901 second-generation Mexican Americans; and 1,454 third- and higher-generation Mexican Americans). A second subsample includes respondents with the characteristics previously mentioned, but who not only were registered but also answered the voting question. The sample size is 59,982 (52,335 third- and higher-generation non-Hispanic Whites; 5,736 third- and higher-generation non-Hispanic Blacks; 373 naturalized Mexicans; 557 second-generation Mexican Americans; and 981 third- and higher-generation Mexican Americans). The samples are fairly equally distributed between males and females, except for Blacks among whose sample is about three-fifths female. Classified as third- and higher-generation Whites [I will refer to this group from now on simply as Whites] are those either born in a United States state or territory or born abroad to U.S. born parents who claimed “White only” as their race. Third- and higher-generation non-Hispanic Blacks [from now on simply Blacks] must satisfy the same nativity conditions and have responded “Black only” for race. First-generation Mexican Americans [or naturalized Mexicans] are those who were born in Mexico to non-U.S. parents and are now citizens of the United States. Second-generation

Mexican Americans defined as those native-born citizens born to at least one Mexican parent. Third- and higher-generation Mexican Americans [referred from now on simply as third-generation Mexicans] are those born in United States territory or abroad to U.S.-born parents, and claim Mexican origins.

Following a similar format to Waldinger & Feliciano's (2004) study on the segmented assimilation of Mexican Americans in terms of employment, I pursue a within group comparison across generations and by gender. Simultaneously, I conduct across group comparisons between Mexican Americans, Whites and Blacks. The contrast between generations within the Mexican American population serves to indicate assimilation – that is, how each succeeding generation compares to Whites, Blacks and each other. The separate analysis by gender will allow for understanding whether the assimilation process operates differently for women. The participatory patterns of Whites are presented as dominant, or mainstream. Alternatively, the participatory patterns of Blacks represent those of the native minority and the underclass, as consistently done in studies regarding assimilation. If an adversarial subculture exists and the descendants of immigrants do mimic the attitudes and behaviors of the native minority, Mexican Americans should show participatory patterns similar to Blacks. Political participation will be measured by responses to the registration and voting questions. In order to control for the effects of age, specially the youth of second- and third-generation Mexicans, the rates are adjusted for age for all the groups using the age distribution of third- and higher-generation non-Hispanic White males and females.

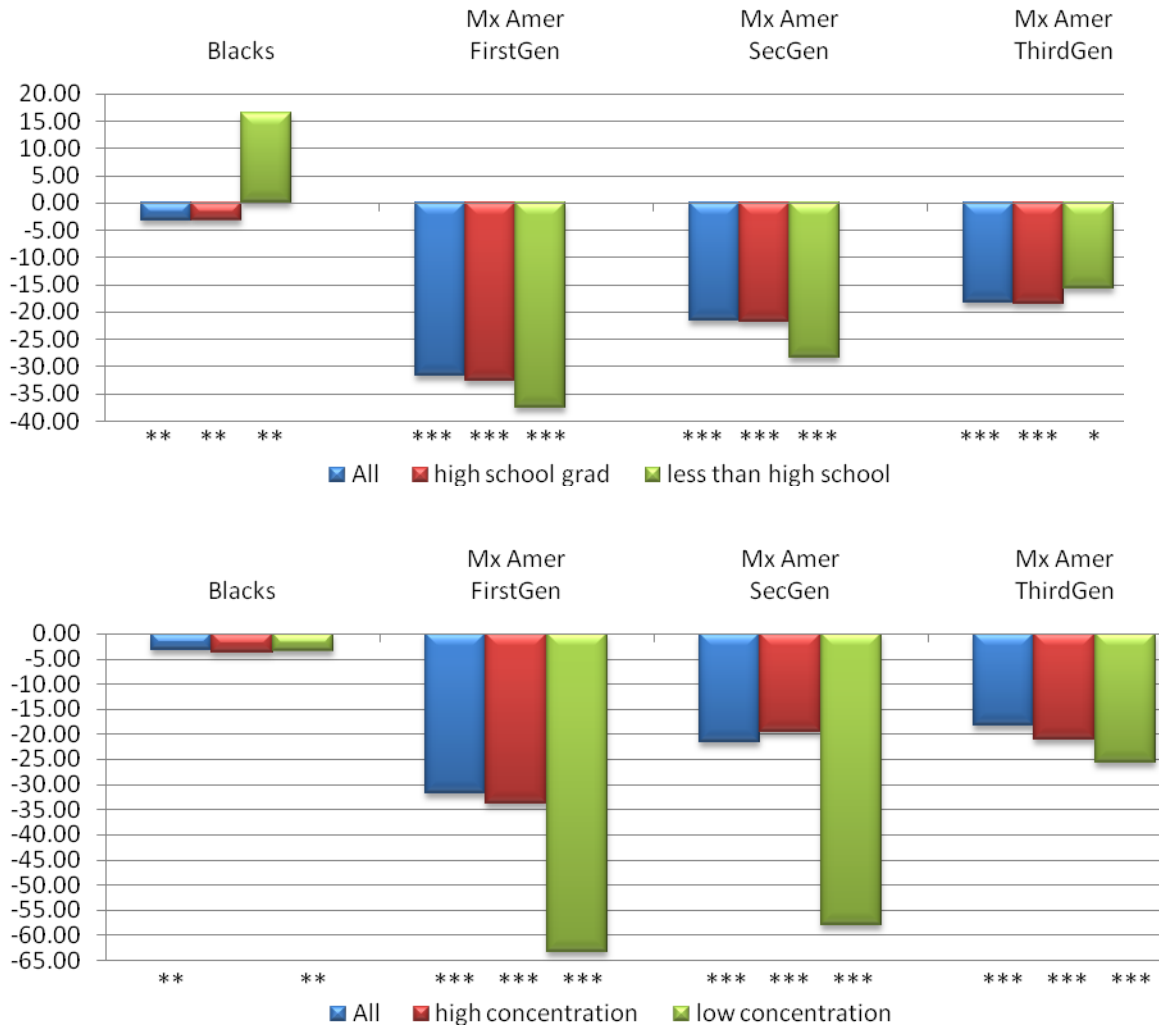
The groups are contrasted in a series of cross-tabulations, shown as graphs, in which I show the zero-order differences across groups. This same process was followed by Waldinger & Feliciano (2004). Then, controls for educational attainment, proven to be the most important

predictor of participation (Junn, 1999), and isolation from co-ethnics will be applied. Education will be measured as high school diploma or higher and less than high school diploma. Isolation from co-ethnics will be measured by high concentration and low concentration areas. In the areas with high concentration of Mexican Americans, i.e. Arizona, California, Illinois, New Mexico, and Texas (as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau), Mexican Americans are assumed to have low isolation from co-ethnics. In the areas that have a low Mexican American population, i.e. the rest of the United States, these are assumed to be more isolated from their co-ethnics.

Findings

Men: As some of the literature on gender, ethnicity and political participation suggests, the assimilation experience of men and women is unequal given gender-differentiated socialization. Thus I conduct my analysis disaggregating by gender. As noted previously, the evidence for Latinos in general and Mexican Americans in particular suggests that they have participation rates lower than Whites. Given the inconclusiveness of previous research on gender, I follow the general literature in expecting Mexican American men not to be fully assimilated into mainstream America by the third generation in terms of political participation, and that their patterns may resemble those of Blacks, the native minority. If the latter was true, assuming that poor Blacks represent America's underclass as in much of the segmented assimilation literature, Mexican Americans could be said to be experiencing downward assimilation. I also expect to find a closing but persistent gap among the better educated and in high concentration areas, where Mexican Americans would be considered to be the least assimilated by classic assimilation theory, if community resources were neglected.

Figure 1. Percentage difference in voter registration rates: comparison to third- and higher-generation White men.



*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: CPS November Supplement 2004; persons older than 18; standardized for age based on age distribution of third- and higher-generation white males and females.

1) *Registration:* Figure 1 shows registration rate comparisons between Mexican American, White and Black men. At first sight, one can notice lower registration rates for all generations of Mexican American men as compared to White and Black men. Although the registration levels increase significantly between the first- and later generations, consistent with previous research, they stagnate between the second- and third generation of Mexican American

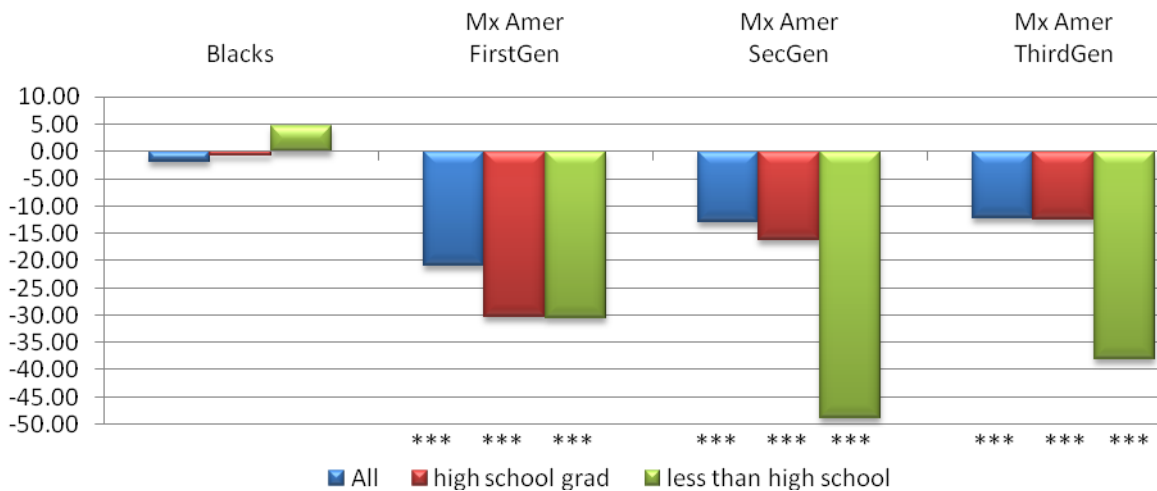
men. Thus, Mexican American men do not achieving full assimilation by the third generation. Despite being significant, the difference between White men and their African American counterparts is small, suggesting that in terms of political participation, Blacks do not represent a standard for non-assimilation. This is evidence that mainstream American is not only White, as assumed in most of the assimilation literature. Introducing a control for educational attainment changes the picture very little. The registration gaps between more educated White men and more educated Mexican American men remain wide. Compared to the gap between the better educated, the difference between Mexican American men who do not hold a high school diploma and similarly-educated Whites increases for the first- and second-generation and narrows for the third-one. Education seems to have a greater impact in the participatory rates of the first and second generations, but much less so in that of the third. No full convergence pattern can be observed.

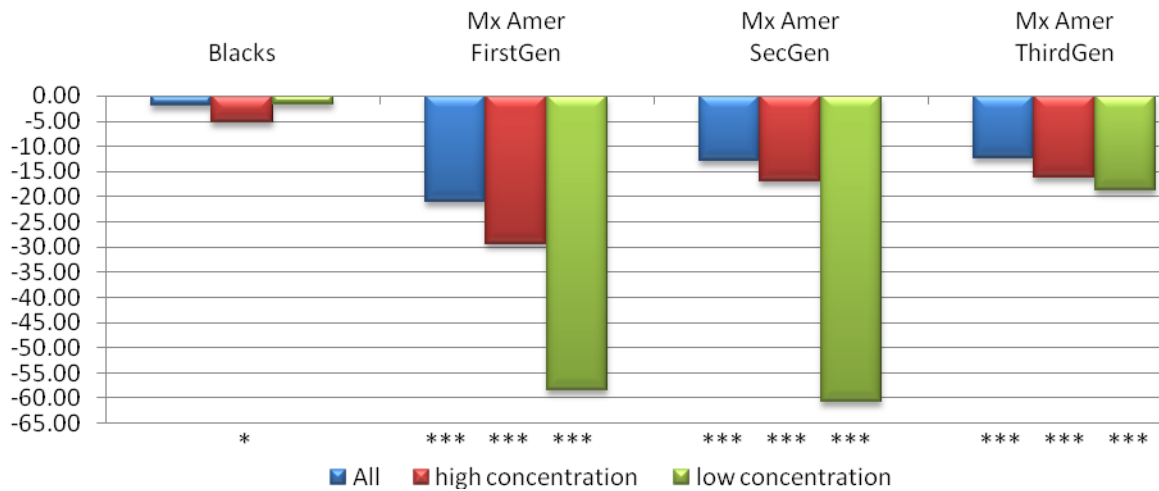
The second graph in Figure 1 shows a persistent gap between Mexican Americans and Whites. However, the gaps are smaller in states with higher concentrations of Mexicans and much wider in those where Mexicans come into less contact with other Mexican Americans. In terms of registration in high Mexican concentration states, Mexican American men present a significant jump between naturalized Mexican men and later generations, but no significant difference between second- and third-generation Mexican American men. Among those in low concentration regions little change can be observed between first- and second-generation Mexican men. Yet, the gap for third-generation men closes significantly more.

2) *Voting*: Although registration is a necessary step in electoral participation, it is not a sufficient indicator of participatory levels. Voting is the additional required step. Figure 2 shows the graphs for voting. Consistent with the findings in registration and in previous research,

Mexican American men across all generations vote at significant lower rates than White men. Mexican Americans are not fully assimilated by the third generation. Naturalized Mexican men vote at lower rates than later generations. Yet, second- and third-generation Mexican American men vote at similar rates and less than Whites and Blacks. Controlling for education shows a gap between naturalized Mexican men who completed high school and similar Whites that is not reduced. The case is similar for second- and third-generation Mexican American men, although the gaps are smaller. The gap between third-generation Mexican American men is slightly smaller than that for those in the second-generation group. Interestingly, Mexican American men who did not complete high school show a widening gap between the first generation- and the second-generation. In fact, second-generation Mexican men with lower educational attainment vote almost fifty percent less than their Whites counterparts. Third generation men also present lower rates than naturalized Mexican men, but the difference between these two generations falls very short of being significant.

Figure 2. Percentage difference in voting rates: comparison to third- and higher-generation White men.

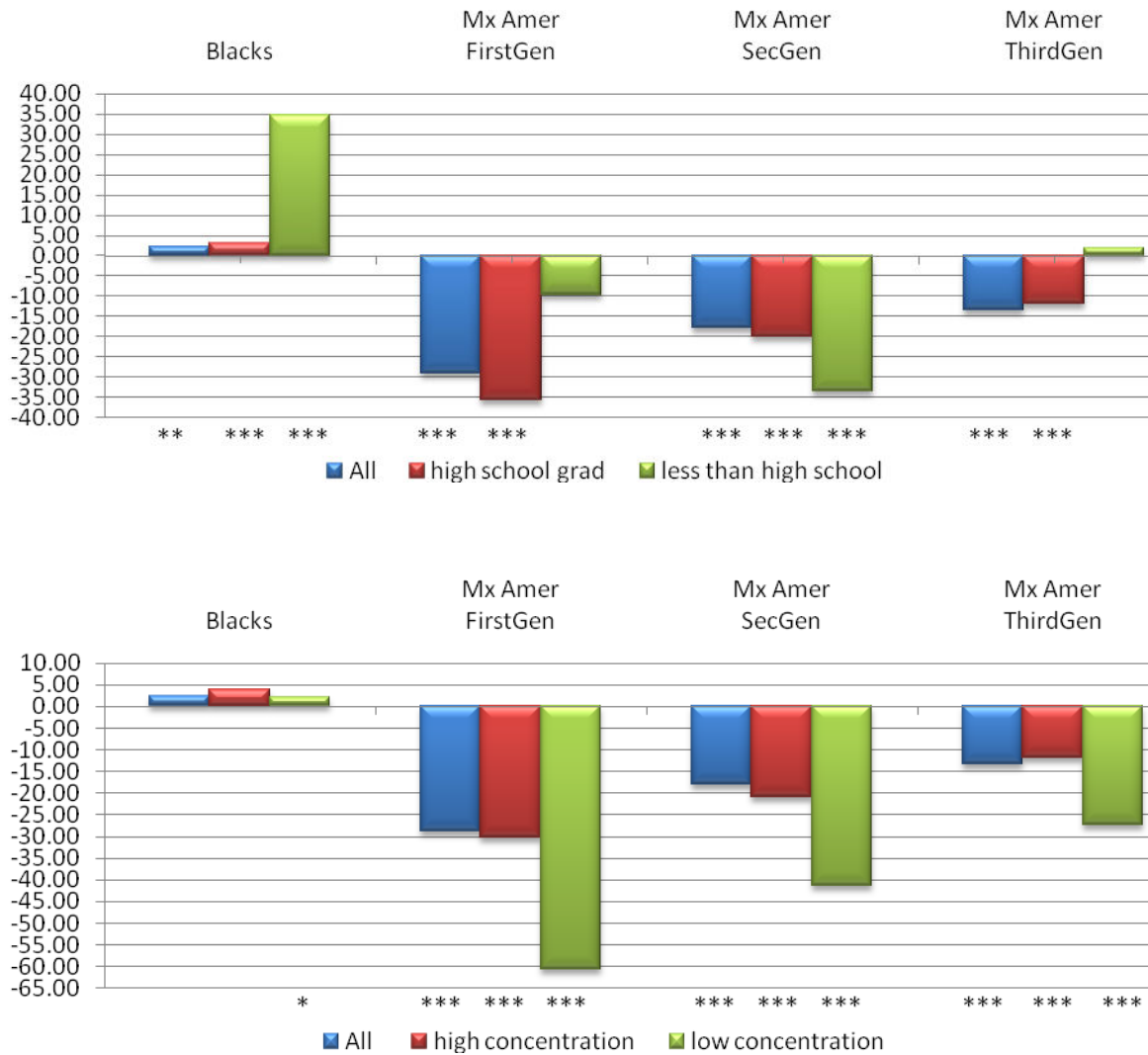




The second graph in the figure in question shows a control for areas where Mexican American men may come in contact with their co-ethnics much more often. The gaps in participation persist. Non-Hispanic Blacks continue to show patterns similar to Whites. The rates increase from the first to the second generation in high concentration areas, but stagnate between the second and third generations. In low concentration areas, the story resembles that found in registration rates for Mexican American men. There is no significant difference between the very low voting rates of naturalized Mexican and those of second-generation Mexican men. The gap for the third generation is much smaller and similar in size to the gap between Whites and third-generation Mexican American men in high concentration areas.

Women: Given the inconclusiveness of the research on gender, I develop the same expectations for Mexican American women as for men. I expect them not to be fully assimilated into mainstream America by the third generation in terms of political participation, and that their rates may resemble those of Blacks, the native minority. Moreover, I expect to find a closing but persistent gap among the better educated and in high concentration areas.

Figure 3. Percentage difference in voter registration rates: comparison to third- and higher-generation White women.



*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: CPS November Supplement 2004; persons older than 18; standardized for age based on age distribution of third- and higher-generation white males and females.

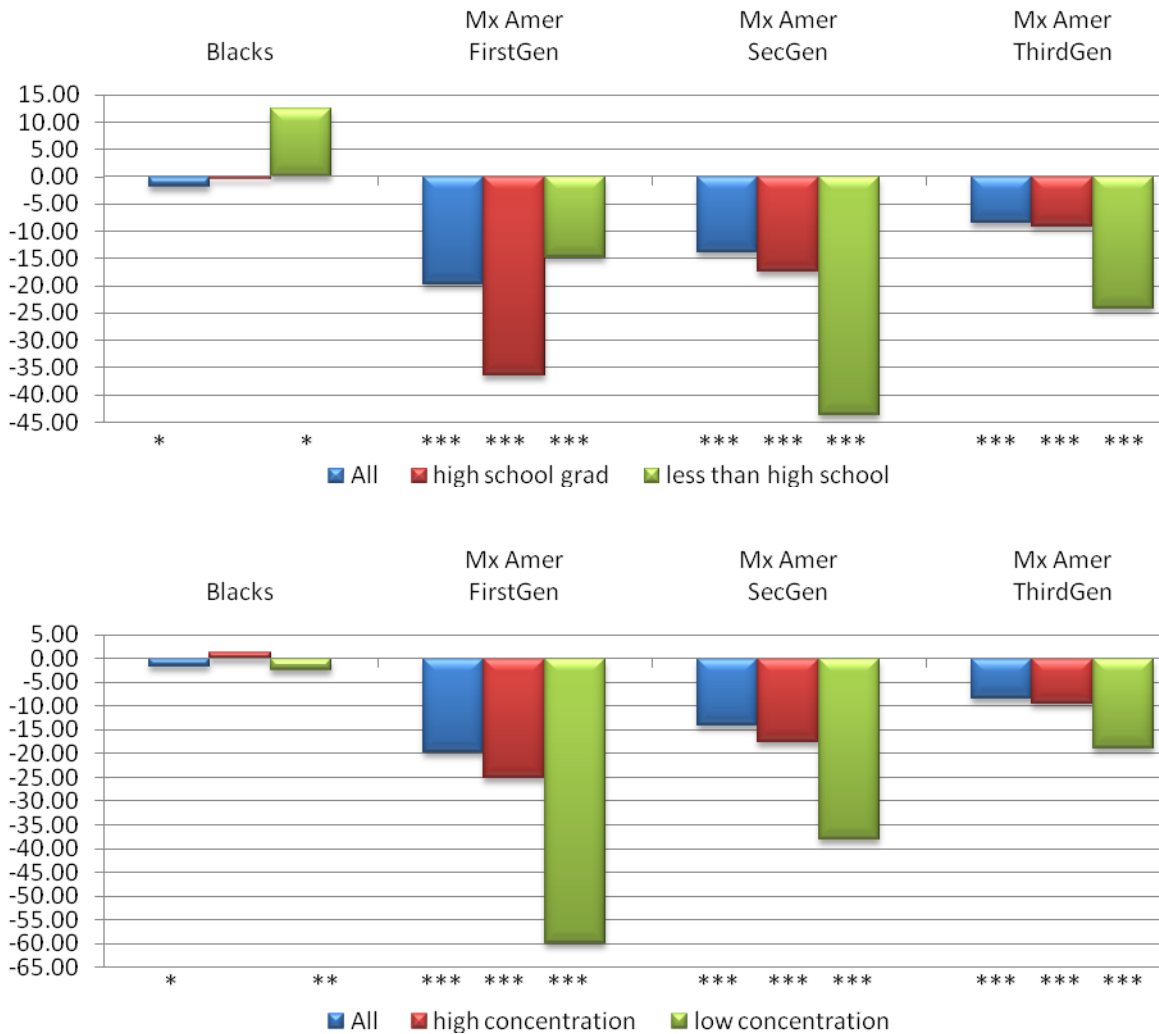
1) *Registration:* Table 3 shows the difference in registration rates for Mexican American and Black females compared to White females (the zero line). Similar to their male counterparts, Mexican American women register at persistently lower rates than White and Black women. Black women present participatory rates similar to those White women, further suggesting that Blacks do not represent a standard for non-assimilation in terms of political participation. First

generation Mexican American women register at the lowest rate. However, registration increases with each succeeding generation. The drop is largest from first to second. The third generation registers at somewhat higher rates than the second generation. These gaps are smaller than the gaps between Mexican American and White men. Hence, women present what seems to be a more straight-line like assimilation process, since rates do not stagnate, and appear to differ a little less from their White counterparts than men. When controls for education are applied, Mexican American women who are high school graduates continue to participate at levels lower than White and Black high school graduated women. The gap is widest for naturalized women and narrowest for the third generation; this indicates the significance of American education in incorporating immigrants into political life. The differences between each succeeding generation are significant. Naturalized Mexican women who did not complete high school register at lower levels than their White counterparts, though the difference is not statistically significant. Registration levels drop greatly for second generation Mexican American women with less than high school, whose registration rates are more than 30 percent lower than their White counterparts. The gap closes for third generation Mexican American women with less than high school, who register at similar rates than White women who did not complete high school.

Considering contact with co-ethnics, as in the second graph of Figure 3, increasing rates for each Mexican American generation can be noticed. Nevertheless, the participatory gaps persist. Also, Mexican American women in high Mexican concentration regions register at higher rates than those in low Mexican concentration states. In both cases, the gap is widest for naturalized Mexicans and smallest for third generation Mexican Americans; the rates do not stagnate between the second and third generations. Interestingly, registration rates increase much more with each succeeding generation in low concentration areas, and much less so in high

concentration ones. Regardless of co-ethnic contact, women show a straight-line assimilation pattern. However, the ethnic community does seem to play a role in narrowing the gap between Mexican American women and White women.

Figure 4. Percentage difference in voting rates: comparison to third- and higher-generation White women.



*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: CPS November Supplement 2004; persons older than 18; standardized for age based on age distribution of third- and higher-generation white males and females.

2) *Voting:* In the case of voting, the picture is not very different. Figure 4 shows that Mexican American women vote at significantly lower levels than White and Black women. Registered Mexican American women vote at higher rates with each succeeding generation.

Participatory levels do not seem to stagnate, yet the differences between these generations fall very short of achieving statistical significance. Introducing controls for education show that, despite remaining persistently lower, the difference in voting turnout between Mexican American and White women who have completed high school narrows with each generation. Of the three Mexican American generations, naturalized women who hold a high school diploma show the widest gap with their White counterparts. In fact, these women vote more than 35 percent less than White women with more than a high school education. The gaps are much smaller for later generations. The patterns resemble those for registration. The difference in voting rates between naturalized Mexican and White women with low educational attainment is the smallest across all three generations. Voting rates drop significantly for the second generation, who vote more than 40 percent less than White women who did not complete high school. The situation improves little for third generation women, but the gap remains larger than for first generation women.

In areas with high concentrations of Mexican Americans, as shown in the second graph of Figure 4, voting rates increase with each succeeding generation. Although the differences are not statistically significant, second generation Mexican American women appear to vote more than naturalized Mexican women, and third generation women more than their second generation counterparts. Despite persistent differences in voting rates, women seem to follow a more straight-line like pattern of assimilation in high concentration areas. Also, relative to their male counterparts, Mexican American women in high concentration show a narrower gap with White females. Mexican American women in low concentration areas also experience increasing participatory rates with each succeeding generation, however. As in the case of registering, the

increases in participation are larger for each generation of Mexican American women in low concentration areas.

Conclusion

In order to answer my research question on the assimilation experience of Mexican American men and women in terms of political participation, I have conducted two different comparative analyses. While answering this question, I also attempt to determine whether the gender-differentiated socialization influences the process by which Mexican American men and women integrate into American political life. The importance of these questions is evidenced by the rapid growth of the Mexican American population in the United States. As noted earlier in this paper, Hispanics, comprised in its majority by Mexican Americans, will change the face of the electorate. As Junn (1999) argues, “differences in participatory input imply inequality in political output” (p. 1419) for those traditionally disadvantaged and politically underrepresented groups. Such groups have tended to be traditionally defined on the basis of either race/ethnicity or gender, yet the intersectionalities of these concepts can no longer be neglected.

The separate analysis conducted for each gender shows that the assimilation experiences of men and women differ. Both Mexican American men and women fail to achieve full assimilation by the third generation, yet their assimilation trends differ. While participatory levels stagnate between the second- and third-generation for men, for women these levels increase with each succeeding generation, showing a more straight-line like assimilation that fits what is suggested by classic assimilation theorists. For both men and women, education seems to be an avenue to assimilation. However, foreign education may not be as significant as exemplified by naturalized Mexicans.

Higher participation in areas with high concentration of Mexicans suggests that Mexican American communities may have more power to mobilize their members. In addition, they may feel more influential with regard to elections, given their electoral weight, and be better represented. Another possibility is that greater political efforts, such as rallies, are carried in these regions in order to gain the influential vote of Mexican Americans, but not necessarily to incorporate these groups into American political life. Although contributing to the retention and reinforcement of the minority's culture, something classic assimilation theory would claim as hindering integration, migrant communities seem to function as a tool for mobilization and empowerment. In areas where the exposure to co-ethnics is lower, Mexican American women seem to also show a pattern of straight-line assimilation, although the rates remain much lower than those of Whites in such areas. Instead, men in these regions seem to lag behind up to the second-generation and improve significantly by the third. Evidently, the reluctance to integrate into American political life proves harder to overcome for men in these areas than for women. In short, Mexican American women seem to be better assimilating into American political life, while men stagnate. Moreover, assimilation is very much influenced by context.

Before concluding, I must point out the two most important limitations of this study. First, the comparisons cannot be considered final by any means, but rather seen as exploratory. One of the important assumptions of this paper is that each generation represents change over time. However, the context in which each group moves is constantly changing, so the experiences of the third generation may not be the same lived by the children of the second-generation in this study. As a matter of fact, comparing a cohort of immigrants, their children and their grandchildren would be a more accurate way to determine the assimilation process undergone by Mexican Americans, but such a study would be timely and expensive. Second, in

this study, third- and higher-generation Mexican Americans were identified by their response to the CPS question on Hispanic origin and on parent's place of birth. However, as Trejo (2003) points out, those third- and higher-generation Mexican Americans who have completely assimilated may no longer even self-identify as Mexicans or Hispanics. Their experiences have been neglected and overlooked in this study, leading to an underestimation of political assimilation among the third generation of Mexican Americans.

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